

The Insufficiency of the Law of Nature.

A
S E R M O N

PREACH'D before the
UNIVERSITY
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C A M B R I D G E

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II. COR. III. 5.

Not that we are sufficient of our selves to think any thing as of our selves, but our sufficiency is of God.

IN order to see the full meaning of the words before us, it is necessary to consider the occasion of them, and their relation to the Context. The Apostle in his former Epistle had been saying many things to the Exaltation of the Gospel he preach'd, and the Diminution of Human Reason; *'We speak not, says he, in the words which Man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.* And in this he gloried, desiring to be so accounted of^b, as a Minister of Christ and Steward of the Mysteries of God. Upon this account he was reflected upon by some, who were puffed up with a vain conceit of their own natural Abilities, and therefore discern'd not Spiritual things; they gave this turn to his glorying in the Lord as tho' he had boasted of himself; whereas he had told them before, and repeats it to them in the verse before my Text, that *the trust that he had, was thro' Christ to*

^a 1 Corinth. II. 13.

^b IV. 1.

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Godward, or that his only confidence was in God thro' Christ, who had made him a Minister of the Gospel, and bestowed on him ability for it; not as if he had sufficiency from himself, or by the strength of his own natural parts, to attain to the knowledge of the Gospel-Truths, which Human Reason could not discover, or which Man could not have known by reasoning, but his *sufficiency*, whereby he knew these things, *was of God*, or from Divine Revelation. The Apostle cannot here be understood to mean, that we are not sufficient of our selves to think any thing at all, or as it has sometimes been interpreted any *good* thing, in the most general and unlimited sense, but only that we cannot λογισαδά τι know by reasoning any of those things, which he had been discoursing to them of, that is, the truths of the Gospel. Which Argument directly asserts the insufficiency of Human Reason in matters of Religion, and therefore infers the necessity of Divine Revelation. And one would think, from an observation of what Human Reason has been formerly, and still is among Persons who either have had no Revelation, or which comes to the same, have not attended to it, that Man could have no Reason to despise this extraordinary Gift of Heaven, nor to think, that his own abilities can carry him so far in his Religious Enquiries, as to make the
word

word of God useless and of no effect. But thus it has happen'd with the Freethinkers of the present Age; they claim to themselves a perfect knowledge of the will of their Creator, and refuse Instruction with scorn, though it is brought from Heaven. And thus the wisdom of God is foolishness with Man; he turns his back on the most gracious offers, and thinks himself too wise to be instructed, even in matters that concern his eternal Interest.

BEFORE I come to examine the pretences, that have been made of late, for setting aside a Revelation as useless and unnecessary, I shall just observe by the way, that a Man must have a very extensive, or rather perfect knowledge of all things, before he can pretend to be acquainted with every thing, that bears any relation to him; and till he knows every such relation, he must be a very incompetent judge of what does or does not properly concern him, of what is really fit or unfit for him: because before a Man can determine *exclusively*, that nothing more than what has already fallen within his notice, can have any relation to him, as a Being capable of Happiness and Misery, he must be sure that he knows the nature of every thing so far as to see every possible way of its affecting him; *i.e.* in the present case, before a Man can say that a Divine Revelation can

be of no use to him, he must first be certain, that there is nothing beyond the discovery of his own Reason, that can any way concern him; that he knows all possible ways of avoiding Misery, and of promoting and improving his own Happiness during the whole of his Existence, and that he always sees so far into the Series of things, as to be as proper a judge of every fitness and unfitness as God himself can be. For such a Creature as Man, to set out with such Principles as these, forebodes no very good success to his Religious Enquiries; as they are the certain result of a Heart full of Vanity and Pride, qualities that have a natural tendency to bias the judgment on the wrong side, and prejudice Men for the party of Vice.

It must be acknowledged to be highly fit and reasonable, that every Man should examine, as far as he has abilities, the pretences upon which any Religion claims to be admitted as upon Divine Authority, that he may see the evidence upon which it stands, and may know whether it be consistent with Reason, and worthy his acceptation and belief, or not. But the way of Reasoning which our modern Deists are in, precludes the very examination of the grounds upon which a Revelation stands, and makes it but a vain and fruitless Enquiry, a matter of mere Speculation only, to consider any part of the evidence

the Law of Nature.

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dence either *external* or *internal*; they being resolved beforehand, not to be determined by such evidence, be it ever so cogent and irrefragable. Their method of Argumentation proceeds *a priori*; and they persuade themselves it *cannot* be true without examining its real Excellency, or the Proofs on which it stands. “The Law of Nature, say “they, is absolutely perfect; therefore external Revelation can add nothing to it, “therefore there can be no occasion for such “Revelation, and therefore there is none”. This is a point which ought to be our first concern to enquire into, because as it strikes at once at all reveal’d Religion whatsoever, the consideration of it must be previous to the consideration of the evidence for any particular Revelation.

THE Arguments of a late Writer^c in Defence of the Perfection of the *Law of Nature*, any one of the least discernment may see, are all Fallacy and Sophistry. And the means which he has used to put a tolerable gloss, and sometimes a shew of Reasoning upon what he has advanced, is chiefly the talking of the *Law of Nature* in a loose indeterminate manner. Sometimes “d ’tis the un- “changeable Law of perfect Reason, sometimes “e ’tis human Reason with its best im-

c Christianity as old &c,

d P. 8,

e P. 6.

prove-

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“provements, sometimes “f ’tis what no
“rational Creature can be ignorant of. And
tho’ it be thus various and indeterminate,
yet the same things shall be predicated of it
in all those different senses; the same con-
clusions follow, however widely the premises
may differ.

WHAT I shall endeavour in this Discourse
shall be, to shew what is meant by the Law
of Nature, and to point out the various sen-
ses, in which it has been understood; and
when these are once distinguished, nothing
will be more evident than the weakness and
absurdity of that Scheme, which proposes
the Law of Nature or human Reason as a
sufficient Guide of it self, and adequate to all
the purposes of Religion.

I. By *the Law of Nature*, is sometimes
meant that eternal and perfect Rule of Rea-
son which exists in the Divine Mind, and
by which he governs and directs all his acti-
ons. In this sense it is, that the Law of
Nature is used, when it has this Character
given to it; *that it is absolutely perfect, eter-
nal and immutable; that it is without defect,
without possibility of receiving addition or alte-
ration*. Both in God and in his Creatures
Reason is the same in *kind* or in its general
nature; for was it not so, ’tis certain we
could form no idea of the Divine Reason,

f Christianity as old &c. p. 373.

nor

the Law of Nature.

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nor think nor argue at all about it, nor make any judgment of the fitness or unfitness of any of God's actions or dealings with Mankind; which yet we always pretend to do, when we examine by our Reason the internal evidence of any Revelation, which assumes the Character of Divine. Reason therefore in the general nature or abstract idea of it, must be every where the same. As a perfection, its idea is uniform and identical in all Beings whatsoever, which are denominated *rational*: but yet as every *Genus* may be considered as made up of, and will be resolvable into its several *Species* so Reason may undoubtedly, in different subjects exist in different manners. In some it may be freer from defect, and approach nearer to its highest degree than in others. And that there can be but one Being, in whom it is absolutely perfect, is as certain as that there is but one God. 'Tis he alone who sees and knows every thing with all their natures and relations, and can suit the fittest means to every end proposed.

WITH regard therefore to the *Law of Nature* as it is presumed to signify the Law of perfect Reason^g, every thing which can be commanded or required by God to be done

^g "The Religion of Nature takes in every thing that is
* founded on the Reason and Nature of things.

Christianity as old &c. p. 13.

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by any Creature, may in this large or lax sense, be called a part of Natural Religion, or a Duty arising from the Law of Nature; because nothing can be the will of the Deity, but what is agreeable to the Rule of the most perfect Reason. Thus if we suppose different Classes or Orders of Rational Beings, endued with different degrees of Reason and Perfection, to all these different Classes, however different the matter of their Religion, or the Duties enjoin'd them may be, (and that they must be different, follows immediately from their different abilities, capacities and powers) yet the Religion of each of them may be comprehended under the one general term of the *Religion of Nature*, as being supposed to flow from the will of God, and therefore to be exactly agreeable to the most perfect Reason, and consequently fitted to the *Nature* of the several Subjects, to whom it is given. In this respect the Religion of the Patriarchs, of Jews, and Christians, of Men and Angels and Archangels may be called one and the same, as agreeing in one general Nature; *i. e.* as fitted to the respective Natures, Circumstances and Conditions of the several Beings, and therefore in that regard absolutely fit and reasonable; because that is always look'd upon to be *absolutely* fit and reasonable, which is adapted in the best manner to procure the end proposed.

posed. And in this sense I apprehend, it is that some late learned advocates for the Christian Cause have so far agreed *in Language* with our modern Deists as to call the Religion of Nature *an absolutely perfect* Religion, and the Law of Nature the *supreme* Law, to which Revelation can add nothing; not understanding by the Law of Nature, such a Law as Human Reason can discover, but only such a one, as is in all respects best suited to Man's Nature, and most perfective of his Happiness. In which sense even *Positive Institutions* are to be look'd upon as Duties of the Law of Nature, because as they are of divine appointment, they are undoubtedly fitted to the nature of the subjects to whom, and the occasions upon which they are given, and are therefore agreeable to the most perfect Reason.

THUS there is no doubt, a best Religion for every rational Creature, the Character of which is, to be best suited to the nature of the Subject, so as to be most perfective of his Happiness. But does it therefore follow, that Reason is a sufficient Guide to lead us to this best, so as to supersede the use of any extraordinary or supernatural Instruction? If so, the Argument proceeds thus; the Law of Nature (as it signifies that system of Rules and Duties which God sees to be fitted to the several natures and conditions of all his

Creatures) is an absolutely perfect and unchangeable Law, therefore that Law which is discoverable by Human Reason, without other assistance, is equally so; or in other words, the Divine Reason is perfect, therefore Human Reason is perfect too. A modern Deist, I know, would give the Argument a different turn^h, and persuade us *a priori*, that Reason must be a sufficient Guide in matters of Religion, because God, *as an infinitely good and gracious Being, must certainly have given Men at all times by the light of their Understanding, sufficient means to discover what makes for the good of their Souls.* To which it may be sufficient to reply at present, that this Argument of what *must be*, is a contradiction to matter of Fact; as 'tis well known, that the generality of Mankind, that part especially, who had the justest notions of their Duty, were not left to the guidance of their own Reason, but had the assistance of Revelation either immediate or traditional; and that the remaining part of them who had not, found Reason so insufficient as not to shew them the common Duties, which they ow'd to God, their Neighbour and themselves. To which I may add, that this Argument proves too

^h Christianity as old &c. p. 12.

much

much, as it would from thence follow that all Men must be endued with equal Capacities, and equal Opportunities of improving them; since it is evident, that the greater advantages Men have in these respects, so much the more capable they will be of discovering a Rule of action, and of knowing what will be their Duty in any given case. There are some Men who are always Infants in Understanding, and I imagine, it cannot be said, that to such Reason is a sufficient Guide, or that their rational Faculties without any foreign assistance can lead them as safely and securely to that state of Happiness Mankind is made capable of obtaining, as the Reason of the wisest Men assisted by Revelation. If there be any one extravagant enough to affirm this, I shall only ask him, whether the light of the Moon would be a sufficient Guide to a Traveller in a dangerous intricate and rugged way, and as useful to all the intents and purposes of bringing him safe to his Journeys end, as if he had all along the benefit of the noon-day Sun.

To conclude this point; 'tis evident that it can be of no manner of use to the Deist to talk of the Law of Nature in this large and general sense, as signifying the Law of the most perfect Reason; because as such it can subsist only in the Divine Mind, and therefore the sufficiency of Human Reason

without supernatural assistance, to discover such a Law or Rule, can never be infer'd from it. The Light of Nature comes vastly short of that all-perfect Law of Nature, or *consummate Reason* of God. Even Revelation it self is but a *partial* Communication of it, *for we know but in part*. But it far exceeds the dim Light of Nature and contains much larger measures of that Divine Wisdom so compleat in it self.

I MUST own, that I cannot wholly approve of the Language of some very learned Defenders of Christianity, who speak of *Natural Religion* as including every thing which 'tis fit and proper for Man to do; for if they only mean by it the eternal Reason and Wisdom of God, (as I would hope they do because they put Christianity in subordination to it, and bring it in only as a means, or help to Natural Religion, to restore it to its native beauty and perfection,) then it is impertinently introduced in a controversy with the Deists.

NOR I think can it be with any propriety call'd a *Law*, as 'tis a mere *Ens Rationis*, an Ideal thing only, of what infinite Wisdom sees to be best adapted to every rational Nature. But with respect to his Creatures it cannot be call'd a Law in an accurate and philosophical sense, because it will not be adequately known by them, and therefore
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can be no farther a Law or Rule of action to them than as to that part of it which they are acquainted with, which will be more or less accordingly as God is pleas'd to make more or less discoveries of it. For as *Law* cannot commence, before Creatures the subjects of Law exist; so neither can it be properly *Law* to any Creatures except such as it is sufficiently promulgated to. *Ideal Law* is not *real Law*. It is at most but a system of *Truths* (not *Laws*) a system of moral Philosophy, or more properly speaking moral Wisdom or Science, and it may as justly be said, that *Natural Philosophy* is perfect and not capable of improvement, as the other. Which though true in such a sense, would yet be thought a very affected and unusual way of speaking and serving no good purpose; since it is no more than saying that Divine Wisdom is infinite or perfect, and saying it in a very odd and singular manner, to confound Ideas, and lead many into mistakes by a new use of Phrases.

If there be any Writers who speak of this Law of Nature, as a perfect Rule to which nothing can be added, and mean by it such a Law as is discoverable by the light of Human Reason if rightly attended to, I must think that they extol *Natural Religion* to the discredit and injury of *Reveal'd*, that the former falls far short of sufficiency and perfection.

tion, and that it has been greatly improved by the latter. The *Patriarchal* first and next the *Mosaical* made great additions to it, and the *Christian* has added much to all.

AND in order to shew this I go on to consider

II. A SECOND sense of the *Law of Nature* which is, that system of moral Duties which Human Reason if rightly attended to and in its uncorrupted state, is capable of discovering without the assistance of Revelation, either immediate or traditional. Some eminent and learned Men have been of opinion, that the Reason of Man as given by God, might have discover'd to him a *perfect* Rule, might have been a *sufficient* Guide in all cases, and a Principle *powerful enough* to preserve him in the constant practice of his Duty; and hence 'tis argued that Revelation is only the *restorer* of Natural Religion, meaning by that, such a Religion as Human Reason if not corrupted would have discovered; and that its only use is to supply that defect, and to repair the breaches of that very Law, which subsisted antecedently to this state of Sin and Corruption, that is, the pure and perfect Law of Nature; so that in this account, the improvements of Revelation are to be consider'd, not as perfective of the Law of Nature, but only as helps to restore obedience to it. This account of the use of Revelation

velation is what I can by no means acquiesce inⁱ, but must be of opinion that the Gospel Revelation is really and truly an improvement upon the Law of Nature, that it has discover'd to us a much more perfect knowledge of Religious Duties, than Human Reason in its greatest purity and highest perfection could possibly have attained to. And I beg leave to offer the Reasons upon which I apprehend, this opinion may be supported and maintain'd.

AND here I think, the first point of Enquiry should be, what method we are to take in order to find out, what Human Reason could *of it self* be sufficient for. The surest way seems to be to argue from fact, as all beyond that can at best be but probable conjecture. And even this method, I confess, is not without its difficulties; because we cannot be certain that in fact any Nation has been entirely without some advantages from Revelation. For though Persons might be without the written word of God in their Hands, yet 'tis possible they might have receiv'd their current notions of

ⁱ *Eusebius* comes much nearer to the truth in supposing Christianity to be a Republication of the ancient *Patriarchal* Religion, and yet that is to be understood *cum grano salis*. For Christianity has much improv'd even *that*, as to clearness, distinctness, perfection. Tho' *that* contain'd all that Human Reason could discover and a great deal more. See the *Fragment of Eusebius lately publish'd by Fabricius de Verit. Relig. Christianæ.*

Religion, by a Tradition handed down from one to another thro' such a long series of Years, that where it began or what gave first rise to it might easily be forgotten. 'Tis indeed highly probable, that those few of the Pagan Philosophers, who retain'd any tolerable notions of Religion, receiv'd them in a traditionary way, or from their immediate communication with the Jews, or at least it can never be made out that the knowledge they had, whether of God or of a Future State or of external Worship was attain'd to by mere Reason, and was not the remains of ancient Revelation ^k.

NOR can we be certain that those Religious Doctrines, which being first taught by Revelation are afterwards approv'd by Human Reason, might therefore have been discoverable by it. To see the Reasonableness of a thing after 'tis told us, and to discover it by the dint of our own Reason, are vastly different things. And tho' a Man may readily assent to a thing propos'd, as certainly true, yet it does by no means follow from thence, that the discovery of it lay within his own reach; as every one must be sensible, who does but observe the improvements, that now and then a great Genius makes in the Sciences, which Men of lower Capacities re-

^k See the Postscript to the Second Part of *Scripture Vindicated*.

ceive from them, and embrace as true, without ever pretending that their own Reason could have attain'd to them without other assistance. And yet our modern Advocates for Natural Religion, to the prejudice of Reveal'd, would give us a System of Morality, founded on Scripture-discoveries, as the product of their own Reason, the discoveries of their own Genius. If we would know what Reason can do by its own strength, we should look among those (if such there be) who have had no assistance from Revelation. We should examine what Systems of Morality prevail'd among the Natives of *America* or at the *Cape of good Hope*; and from thence form a judgment of what our present Moralists could do in Divine matters with the like Education.

BUT not to insist upon niceties, and allow more than could be demanded in the present Argument. Let us take our standard of Human Reason from the best of the Pagan Philosophers. And we shall easily see from comparing theirs with the Christian Scheme, how very far short their several Systems fell of the perfection of a true and compleat Morality. If a Man should compare *Tully's Offices*, with the Morals of the *New Testament*, he would be ten times more absurd, than he that should equal the most bungling piece of Mechanism, to the beauty and harmony manifested in the

contrivance of the Mundane System. Or take any of those Sages, whom you think freest from errors, and you'll find his Scheme, if not pregnant with absurdities, yet at least defective; and defective even in Fundamentals. For it may be observed, that however their wise Men admir'd and spoke the praises of Virtue, yet they wanted the true Principle to found it upon, they wanted what was requisite to recommend themselves to God as his Servants, and to make themselves proper subjects of Reward. What I mean is, that they acted not upon a true Principle of Religion, which can be only a Principle of *obedience* to the will of God. They look'd not up to him in their virtuous actions, and therefore could not properly be said to be his Servants. For however *materially* good an action may be, 'tis evident, it can have nothing of *Religion* in it any farther, than it is done in obedience to the Deity: For if *to whom we yield our selves Servants to obey, his Servants we are to whom we obey*; then certainly there can be no Religion in following Virtue ¹*for Virtue's sake* or for the

1 Some late Writers have invented a distinction between *Moral Virtue* and *Religion*. The *former* they make to consist in being govern'd by the fitness of things, the *latter* in obedience to the will of God: Which if it has any sense in it, must mean, that *Moral Virtue* is built upon present convenience, *Religion* takes in another Life. See a *Second Letter to a Deist*. p. 64. *Christianity as old as the Creation*. p. 298.

sake of any thing but God alone. And how notoriously short and imperfect all the Schemes of Morality among the Pagans were upon this single account, is obvious to every one, who is the least conversant in their Writings.

BUT this method of arguing from Fact may possibly be objected to, and it may be urg'd, that we are not to take our standard of what Reason might be, from what it has been, because Men have not made the best use of their Reason, which has been corrupted ever since *Adam's* transgression; who may be thought perhaps to have been much more perfect in Reason before he fell, than any of his Posterity; and that if he had not fallen, the whole of our Duty would have been so clear and certain to every Understanding, as to have superseded the use of Revelation. As to the perfection of *Adam's* Reason, if we consider the History of him, as related by *Moses*, I apprehend that we shall have no great cause for saying such exalted things of him, as some People have done. We find God reveal'd himself to him, as soon as he was created, and gave him particular directions what he should eat, and what he should abstain from. ^m *And God said behold I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the Earth and*

^m Gen. I. 29. II. 17.

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every

every Tree, in which is the fruit of a Tree yielding seed. — but of the Tree of the knowledge, of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.

Which shews that he was wholly to depend on God for instruction, and not to judge for himself concerning what was good or evil, fit or unfit for him. And this surely was abundantly sufficient, and much better than that he should be left to the direction of his own rational Faculties, which if you suppose never so clear and never so strong, yet having made no observations on the natures of things, he could know no more of them than what he was taught by Revelation. And if *Adam* wanted instruction in the common affairs of life, how could he be capable of judging for himself in matters of Religion? For Reason could do nothing without Ideas. And how could he have proper Ideas of *God* or of the *Terms* that God would expect, or of the *Sanctions* of Rewards and Penalties, without Revelation? What depended on the free pleasure of God, no Reason could discover, though it were the Reason of the highest Angel or most perfect Creature possible. For who knoweth the mind of God, save the Spirit of God that is in him?

AND indeed unless we suppose *Adam* to have either supernatural knowledge or different faculties from what are now to be found among

among Mankind, he could have neither Language nor Religion nor Reason; he would have no end of action but gratifying his Instincts, nor any desires to satisfy but his natural Appetites. 'Tis I know commonly said that God gave to Man *Reason* whereby he might discover his Religious Obligations; but this is not strictly true. *Reason* is no otherwise the gift of God than as he created Man with faculties, whereby he might in certain circumstances acquire the power of seeing the fitness or unfitness of certain means to certain ends, which is all we mean by *Reason*. But where there are not those circumstances given, where a Man has no *Data* to go upon, no Ideas to compare or operate upon, there this faculty cannot be exercised nor be of any use. And if he has had no instruction, no assistance *ab extra*, his Law of Nature will be what his Appetites direct him to pursue, his Knowledge and Ideas will be wholly conversant about the objects of Sense. The truth of which is fully confirm'd from observations made upon the different talents and rational abilities of Men, according to their different ways of Life and methods of Education. For what else is it that makes a difference between the politest and the most barbarous People? Have they not all alike this gift of God, the faculty of Reason? And how comes it to pass, that where a
Man

Man has liv'd in Deserts without communication with any of his Species, there it is always found, that such a one is like to Man in nothing but his outward form? Which shews the necessity of having recourse to a divine Revelation, in order to account for that knowledge which was in the World in the earliest times.

BUT if these observations should be thought uncertain and not to be depended upon, when applied to *Adam* or any Man else in his uncorrupted state; let us go on, and suppose Men to be endued with that faculty of abstract Reasoning, which we see they are capable of attaining to, by the help of Instruction, Conversation and Study. Let us suppose their rational faculties improv'd in the highest degree, that they have all the powers of reflection, as of compounding, dividing, comparing and abstracting their Ideas, as perfect as the greatest Philosopher that ever liv'd, yet still it must be acknowledg'd that their Law of Nature will fall greatly short of the Christian Scheme. 'Tis a maxim so true as to need no proof, that *that* Religion is the most perfect which is the most adequate to the Subjects Duty; and that is most adequate to his Duty, which enlarges his knowledge of the moral relations he stands in to the other parts of the rational World, each of which relations discovers a new Duty: And who

who can be so blind as not to see, that Christianity has made such discoveries to us, as were absolutely beyond the reach of Human Reason; and discoveries, upon which our Happiness or Misery greatly depend? Could meer Reason have found out those relations, which the Scripture informs us, we bear to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to Archangels, Angels, and the whole System of rational Beings, of which we make up one part? And as from a discovery of these new relations, we find that new Duties are requir'd, so (because they would always have been Duties if made known) they must certainly be improvements in Religion, and advance such as duly observe them a step higher in perfection.

AND that from the Scripture we have new motives also to the practice of Religion, is so evident as not to admit of a dispute. St. Paul has told usⁿ, that *Charity shall never fail*, which means, that those benevolent affections and habits of Love, which we contract in this Life, shall attend us to the other, that they shall for ever remain with us, and meet with objects for the exercise of them to all eternity. Where is that Human Reason, that could have given us such an incitement to an unlimited Benevolence, an universal

ⁿ 1 Cor. XIII. 8.

Love of all rational Beings with which we are acquainted?

NAY farther I must own that 'tis with me a great question, whether Reason alone could have given Men any knowledge of a Future State. Arguments drawn from the nature of the Soul do at most amount to no more than a bare *possibility* of a future Existence, which is far from a proof of an *actual* one. And those taken from a consideration of the unequal distribution of good and evil in this Life will be found to be very precarious and uncertain, if it be consider'd, that every Man has or may have except by his own fault as much Happiness as Misery in this Life, and therefore if all be at an end here, he can have no Reason to complain. Or if the Argument were good in some particular cases, yet it does not prove that even good Men may not have a great deal to *suffer* in another World, before their Reward commences; neither does it prove that their Reward will be very *great* or very *lasting*. Nay upon the Hypothesis of many ancient Philosophers and of our present Deists^o, that *Virtue is its own Reward*, the Argument is wholly inconclusive, because then every virtuous Man has his Reward here. And it may be farther said, that whenever Life is no longer worth the enjoying, any Man can

• See Christianity as old &c. p. 25.

quit it, can dispatch himself, and so has the remedy in his own hands; and can never be necessitated to be long miserable here. So that till it be certainly known, that Self-Murder draws worse consequences after it; that is, till it be certainly known that there is *another Life* after this, the Argument drawn from unequal distribution does not prove one. It *supposes* rather than *proves* the point in question; because it supposes a Man bound to endure any Miseries, rather than dispatch himself: which again supposes an after-Reckoning, or has no sense in it.

BUT it may be said, that a Person reduc'd to this hard necessity is however less happy, than many who are never so reduc'd; and therefore still there is an unequal distribution of things, which wants to be balanc'd. But if none have just Reason to complain, (as upon this Hypothesis none have) how can it be prov'd that Divine Goodness is strictly oblig'd to make all his Creatures equally happy? He may say *Friend I do thee no wrong: may not I do what I will with my own?*

THESE observations will I think shew us thus much, that Human Reason in its highest perfection and with its greatest improvements could never have brought us to such a perfect knowledge of our Duty in its full extent, as we now have by the assistance of Revelation; that the former could have gone

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but a very little way in Religion without the assistance of the latter; and consequently that the Law of Nature as discoverable by Human Reason, is far from being absolutely perfect, and sufficient; insomuch that a Revelation was necessary to supply the defects of that Law, and that the Gospel Revelation has in fact done it; and therefore is not merely a Republication of the Law of Nature, or a Restorer of it, but an actual improver and perfecter of it.

I proceed to consider

III. A THIRD sense of the *Law of Nature*, which is that plain system of Duties, which 'tis said^p no rational Creature can be ignorant of, who attends to the dictates of his own Mind; 'tis what the ignorant Peasant may know as well as the most learned. One would suspect that this sort of Language supposed the truth of the old exploded Hypothesis of certain *νομὰι ἔννοιαι*, primary Notions and Characters stamp'd upon the Mind of Man originally, and so deeply imprinted as never to be eras'd. At least it supposes all the Duties of Religion to be so obvious and self-evident, that 'tis impossible for any one (except the most stupid and careless) to miss knowing them. I have before observ'd that Human Reason is nothing, but as it is acquir'd and improv'd by instruction and study;

^p Christianity as old &c. p. 370.

and I may now add, that in proportion to the instruction Men have receiv'd, and their attention to it, so will their intellectual Faculties as well as their actual Knowledge be improv'd. The knowledge of Religion as a Speculative Science must be attain'd to, in the same manner, as other Speculative Sciences are; *i. e.* by a serious enquiry into what others have advanc'd, and a close and severe application of Mind, to the Ideas which offer themselves, in order to discern their agreement or repugnancy, and so to trace out the truth. And to see how well qualified the generality of Men are to do this, we need not travel to those Barbarous Regions, where the most absurd, cruel and unnatural Rites are parts of the establish'd Religion; let us only consider the unlearned part of any Country whatever, and see how well they can set out a Scheme of Religious Duties upon Rational Grounds, without the assistance they have receiv'd from Revelation. Some are under a natural incapacity from their very frame and constitution; others become incapable from a total neglect of the culture of their Mind; and a very large part of Mankind are wholly occupied in servile labour and oblig'd to it for a subsistence. These and several other accidental causes make it impossible for much the greatest part of Mankind either to trace out a moral Rule for

themselves by dint of Reasoning and Speculation, or to make a just and rational judgment, which is the true one among the several propos'd. They must therefore take up with the opinions of their Parents or their Country without seeing the Reasons of them: And for any thing that the internal Light of their own Reason or Nature can do, may as readily fall into Vice as Virtue, and be taught to admire and love the former, as much as wise Men do the latter.

AND thus Reason is evidently shewn to be an insufficient Guide in matters of Religion, at least to the generality of Mankind. If it be ask'd, what is a sufficient one? The answer is, a Divine Revelation, because that, and that only, can answer the great end of fixing a Rule of Duty (for those who can't judge for themselves) as having the confirmation of Divine Authority. Here are none of those difficulties, which arise from Men's inability to judge of the truth of any System of Religion propos'd by a Philosopher; for what is known to be reveal'd must *therefore* be believ'd implicitly: And whether a thing be reveal'd or not, is an appeal to the Senses, (as a Revelation must stand upon the evidence of Miracles) and therefore what every Man who has eyes and ears is a proper judge of; And what in after Ages every Man may have as clear and ample evidence of, as he can either

ther have or desire in any matter of Fact whatever.

THE Writer whom I have had a view to in this Discourse, hopes to salve a lame Hypothesis by adding to the high things he says of Reason, that 'tis sufficient to teach a Man his Duty, so far as 'tis *necessary* for him to know it^q. The question here is, what is meant by *necessary*, a Term which is always *relative* and therefore *ambiguous*. In one sense that alone is strictly necessary, which is sufficient to keep a Man from Misery, if he makes the best use of it, as we may say, that a Man has as much sense as is necessary, if he has but enough to keep himself out of Fire and Water. And if this Writer means that Reason is all the Guide which is necessary for Man in this sense, it may be granted him; as it only comes to this, that God will not require any thing of Man, which he has not given him abilities to perform, nor punish him for not making use of a Revelation, which 'tis impossible he should come at. But this can be of no service in the cause, nor can any thing be concluded from hence to the discredit or injury of Revelation.

FOR in another sense Reason is not a sufficient Guide nor all that is necessary, *viz.* with relation to that state of perfection,

^q Christianity as old &c. p. 372.

which

which Human Nature with all the helps and assistances of Revelation is capable of attaining. I have shewn above, that a discovery of new Relations, new Duties, and new motives to the practice of them is an improvement in Religion; and nothing can be more evident than that all improvements in Religion advance such as duly observe them a step higher in perfection and entitle them to a greater degree of Happiness. And if this be denied, it will follow that as long as Men are *sincere*, it is of no importance, whether they have right or wrong apprehensions of God, whether they be Mahometans, Papists, or Protestants, as 'tis to be hoped, there are some of each Sect very *sincere*. But whatever some may pretend, nothing can be more unreasonable and weak than to suppose that Men shall be rewarded in proportion to their sincerity only. Their capacities and powers must also be taken into the account, it being agreeable to the strictest Reason and Equity, as well as taught in Scripture, that he who has acted with equal sincerity in a superior station should have a superior Reward, that he who had ten Talents, and improv'd them to the utmost of his abilities, should be put into a higher station, than he who had only five and improv'd them in a proportional degree.

I SHALL

I SHALL only entreat your patience, while I consider briefly the necessity of Revelation in one view more; *viz.* as 'tis a necessary means to restrain Men from Vice, and make them attend to their Duty. For however it may be pleaded, that Reason might be sufficient in its pure uncorrupted state, yet there is no room to contend that it has been so in fact. That there always has been a notorious corruption of manners among the generality of Mankind is too plain to be denied; and whatever might be the cause of this, whether a defect in Reason it self, or Men's abusing and misapplying their Reason, 'tis nevertheless true, that they wanted instruction, and that some other Guide was necessary to lead them into the right way, from whence they had deviated notwithstanding all their Reason. And hence we may justly conclude, that if there be any so far abandon'd, as still to reject and despise this Guide, that they love darkness rather than light, that they prefer a state of Ignorance, Error, and Misery to a state of Knowledge, Happiness and Perfection.

To conclude, the Law of Nature, consider'd as the eternal, immutable Law or Rule of Reason, is absolutely perfect: but because this is what exists no where but in the Divine Mind, no inference can be drawn from hence to the prejudice of an external Revelation,

lation, to shew that it is either useless or unnecessary. And if any thing else be understood by the Law of Nature, if it be Human Reason in its uncorrupted state, or with its greatest improvements, or the Reason of the generality of Men such as has always in fact subsisted among them; in any or all of these senses 'tis an imperfect defective Rule, and wholly insufficient for those great ends and purposes, which may be serv'd by Revelation.

THE sum of all may be compris'd in the following particulars.

1. CONSUMMATE Reason is in God alone.
2. IT is imparted to Creatures in different degrees and sundry ways.
3. IT is more or less perfect in Creatures in proportion to the *capacity* of the Subject and the fulness of the discoveries made.
4. TO Man it is imparted by Notices *natural* and *supernatural*.
5. SUPERNATURAL Notices singly are more and greater than *natural*; but that both together are more and greater than either singly is as plain as that the whole is greater than a part.
6. MORE Light of course enlarges the Rule of Duty; and so improves Religion, and consequently Happiness.

AND if this be true, we have gain'd at least thus much, that Christianity should be fairly

fairly tryed, and the evidence upon which it stands, impartially examin'd. And then I make no doubt but it will appear, to be built upon the Rock of Truth, to the confounding the vain Philosophy of foolish and self-conceited Men, and that what no other Law could do, God by sending his Son into the World has done for us; *To whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

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